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**Complicating the Rhetoric: How Racial Construction  
Conounds Market-Based Reformers' Civil Rights  
Invocations**

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**Abstract:** Reformers today maintain the use of civil rights rhetoric when advocating for policies that address educational inequity. While continuing the legacy of earlier civil rights activists, the leaders invoking this rhetoric and the educational platforms they promote differ greatly from previous decades. Not only does this new crop of reformers differ demographically, they also tend to promote market-oriented policies like the expansion of charter schools and other school choice initiatives that embody market logics alongside a sharp retrenchment from the public sphere. While scholars have revealed how these policies generate questionable outcomes for students and communities of color, few have considered the manner in which marginalized racial groups are characterized and framed amidst these reforms and cries for civil rights. In this empirical paper, I use critical discourse analysis (CDA) to analyze how race-based constructions complicate the use of civil rights rhetoric in today's increasingly

marketized educational context. Specifically, I investigate how two educational leaders discuss race within comments about education and its connection to civil rights. The findings suggest that the leaders allude to race without explicitly naming it in the context of civil rights discourse. In addition, their civil rights invocations exist alongside subtly constructed, negative racial narratives that they articulate in the context of their statements. Given these findings, this paper ends with a discussion of these seemingly incompatible discourses. In particular, I interrogate how these racial constructions reflect the characteristics of colorblindness and how this, in turn, may undermine policies the aim to address racial inequity.

**Keywords:** rhetoric, race, civil rights, discourse analysis

### **Para complicar la retórica: la forma en la construcción racial confunde invocaciones de los derechos civiles de reforma basada en el mercado**

**Resumen:** Los reformistas hoy a mantener el uso retórico de los derechos civiles cuando defienden políticas que aborden la desigualdad educativa. Mientras que el legado de los activistas de derechos civiles continúa anteriores, los líderes llaman a esta retórica y plataformas educativas que promueven, que difieren enormemente de las décadas anteriores. No sólo estos nuevos cultivos reformistas difieren demográficamente, que también tienden a desarrollar iniciativas orientadas al mercado, iniciativas como la expansión de las escuelas calificadas y otras iniciativas de opciones educativas que incorporan los principios del mercado junto a una fuerte caída de la esfera pública. Aunque los estudiosos han demostrado que estas políticas generan resultados cuestionables para los estudiantes y las comunidades de color, pocos han considerado la forma en que los grupos raciales marginados y se caracterizan forma en medio de estas reformas y llaman a los derechos civiles. Este trabajo empírico, yo uso el análisis crítico del discurso (ACD) para analizar cómo las construcciones basadas en la raza complican el uso retórico de los derechos civiles en el contexto educativo cada vez más hoy en día “commodity”. En concreto, se investiga cómo dos líderes de la educación discuten temas de raza dentro de los comentarios sobre la educación y su relación con los derechos civiles. Los resultados sugieren que los líderes aluden a llegar sin nombrar explícitamente el contexto del discurso de los derechos civiles. Por otra parte, sus invocaciones de derechos civiles coexisten sutilmente la forma construida, con narrativas raciales negativas que se articulan en el contexto de sus declaraciones. A partir de estos hallazgos, este documento concluye con una discusión de estos discursos aparentemente incompatibles. En particular, me pregunta cómo estas construcciones raciales reflejan las características de la “ceguera al color racial (?)” ¿Y esto, a su vez, puede socavar las políticas para hacer frente a la desigualdad racial.

**Palabras clave:** la retórica; raza; los derechos civiles; análisis del discurso

### **Complicando o retórico: como a construção racial confunde invocações de direitos civis reformistas baseadas no mercado**

**Resumo:** Reformistas, hoje, mantêm o uso retórico dos direitos civis quando defendem políticas que abordam a desigualdade educacional. Enquanto o legado de ativistas de direitos civis anteriores continua, os líderes invocam essa retórica, e plataformas educacionais que eles promovem, que diferem muito de décadas anteriores. Não só estas novas safras de reformistas diferem demograficamente, eles também tendem a promover iniciativas orientadas para o mercado, iniciativas como a expansão das escolas qualificadas e outras iniciativas de escolha da escola que incorporam lógicas de mercado ao lado de uma retração acentuada da esfera pública. Embora os estudiosos têm revelado como essas políticas geram resultados questionáveis para estudantes e comunidades de uma cor, poucos têm considerado a maneira na qual grupos raciais marginalizados são

caracterizados e moldados em meio à essas reformas e pedem por direitos civis. Neste trabalho empírico, eu uso análise crítica do discurso (CDA) para analisar como construções baseadas em raça complicam o uso retórico dos direitos civis no contexto educacional cada vez mais “mercantilizado” de hoje. Especificamente, eu investigo como dois líderes educacionais debatem questões de raça dentro dos comentários sobre a educação e sua relação com os direitos civis. Os resultados sugerem que os líderes fazem alusão a chegar sem explicitamente nomear no contexto do discurso dos direitos civis. Além disso, suas invocações de direitos civis coexistem, de forma sutilmente construída, com narrativas raciais negativas que articulam no contexto de suas declarações. A partir destas conclusões, este artigo termina com uma discussão desses discursos aparentemente incompatíveis. Em particular, eu questiono como essas construções raciais refletem as características do “daltonismo racial (?)” e como esta, por sua vez, pode comprometer as políticas a fim de abordar a desigualdade racial.

**Palavras-chave:** retórica; raça; direitos civis; análise do discurso

## Introduction

To garner support for and adherence to their initiatives, policymakers and reformers actively employ strategies to legitimate their educational platforms in the eyes of the public. They engage in strategic behaviors to persuade political figures, donors, parents, district officials, and communities of the value of their educational missions, approaches, and policies. At a fundamental level, these political processes are about establishing a reform’s meaning (Taylor, 2004)—to align one’s educational policy to broader social, economic, political, and moral purposes. While these policy processes can be varied and multiple, discourse, or the language used by educational leaders, plays a critical role, serving as a mechanism for which a particular reform is known and understood. Policymaker and reformer discourse can convey purposes behind reforms, which may in turn, guide the manner in which these leaders envision and enact their initiatives.

While reformers and educational leaders employ a variety of rhetorical themes to generate support for their policies, a frequently utilized phrase that is linked to policy efforts is civil rights (Frankenberg, 2011; Scott, 2013a, 2013b; Snider, 1989; Wilgoren, 2000). Though the quest for the advancement of civil rights in the United States (US) has consistently included demands for increased educational equity among racial groups (Anderson, 1988; Perlstein, 2002; Watkins, 2005), the demographic composition of the leaders invoking this rhetoric and the policies they promote differ greatly from previous decades. Earlier, the simultaneous call for educational equity and civil rights tended to elevate communitarian goals and was predominantly led by communities of color. Today, many educational reformers invoking civil rights language include corporate and private sector advocates who appropriate and redefine civil rights to emphasize individualistic aspirations through the expansion of choice and individual empowerment (Scott, 2013a, 2013b). To illustrate, a vice president of Goldman Sachs, also serving on the board of New York City charter school, noted in an interview with the *New York Times* that charter schools were “the civil rights struggle of my generation” (Hass, 2009). Further amplifying the resonance of this message, former U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan presented a similar sentiment when he stated that the pro-school choice documentary *Waiting for Superman* represented a “Rosa Parks moment” for education (Allan, 2010; Scott 2013a). In both instances, educational leaders explicitly or implicitly alluded to the Civil Rights era, publicly positioning their ideological and political work in support of school choice and charter schools in the midst of the social justice framework and legacy.

While the merits of school choice as constituting a civil right are debatable, what is certain is that the promotion and subsequent proliferation of market-oriented policies like charter schools directly affect communities of color and have underlying racial dynamics that may complicate the invocation of this rhetoric and imagery. Beyond the fact that references to the civil rights movement and Rosa Parks conjure racialized images and perceptions, these initiatives have direct racial implications in that they are disproportionately enacted in urban communities of color (Lubienski, 2010; Scott, 2008; Wells, Holme, Lopez, & Cooper, 2000). Moreover, those leading the charge for market-oriented reforms are predominantly wealthy, white males (Scott, 2008) whose ideological interests and networks have historically served to disenfranchise communities of color through a general neglect of structured racial inequity, a pathologization of raced spaces, and minimization of communitarian efforts to empower communities of color (Lipman, 2011).

Given the racial dynamics surrounding market-oriented school reform, it is imperative to examine how race is positioned amidst these reforms and cries for civil rights. While many researchers have examined race and civil rights in the context of charter schools and market reforms, they infrequently consider how race and racial narratives are discursively constructed and circulated in the midst of this rhetoric and how these constructions may then undermine a policy's espoused intention. To address this gap in the literature, I use the theories and methods of critical discourse analysis (CDA) to analyze how race-based constructions complicate the use of civil rights rhetoric in today's increasingly marketized educational context. Specifically, I investigate how two educational leaders, squarely situated within the market-oriented education sector, discuss race amid comments regarding education and its connection to civil rights. The first of these leaders is Joe Perry,<sup>1</sup> a white male who worked as an organizational leader in a prominent charter management organization (CMO). The second leader is the former U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, one of the nation's leading policymakers who has maintained a deep commitment to promoting market-based reforms like charter schools and school turnarounds at the municipal and federal level. In analyzing their racial constructions, this study addresses the following research questions:

- How, if at all, do Perry and Duncan discuss race in the context of civil rights rhetoric?
- What discursive strategies do Perry and Duncan use to describe students and communities of color?
- How do their racial discourse patterns bolster, complicate, or undermine the use of civil right rhetoric?

The findings suggest that both Perry and Duncan employ linguistic moves that enable them to allude to race without explicitly naming it in the context of civil rights discourse. In addition, their civil rights invocations exist alongside subtly constructed, negative racial narratives that they articulate in the context of their statements. Thus, the racial constructions Duncan and Perry espouse reflect the characteristics of colorblind discourse (Bonilla-Silva, 2002, 2006), enabling them to use semantic moves to 'safely' voice negative racial sentiments. Given the absence of overt racial references and the presence of negative racial depictions in the context of their civil rights comments, this paper ends with a discussion of the implications surrounding the espousal of these discourses by educational leaders. It considers how these seemingly incompatible discourses may undermine leadership and policy efforts to redress racial inequity and advance civil rights for people of color under market-based reform.

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<sup>1</sup> This name is a pseudonym as to maintain the participant's anonymity.

## Race & Civil Rights Under Market-Oriented Policies: A Review of the Literature

Over the past two decades, researchers have conducted empirical studies examining the intersection between race, civil rights, and market-based policies (Buras, 2011; Dixson, 2011; Frankenberg, Siegel-Hawley, & Wang, 2010; Lipman, 2011; Orfield & Frankenberg, 2013; Scott, 2013a). Because of their growing popularity and bipartisan support, researchers relating these concepts have increasingly attended to the impact of charter schools and examined patterns of racial segregation and its subsequent implications for civil rights' advancement. For instance, researchers have frequently demonstrated that charter schools are more racially segregated and isolated than traditional public schools and in turn, called for more stringent civil rights standards to be applied to these choice initiatives (Frankenberg & Lee, 2003; Frankenberg & Siegel-Hawley, 2009; Fuller, Elmore, & Orfield, 1996). Other scholars shed light on the need for increased oversight of the charter sector as they expose the mechanisms by which this re-segregation pattern has unfolded. Specifically, they demonstrate how charter schools engage in "cropping" students whose language or special education needs make them more costly to educate (Lacireno-Paquet, Holyoke, Moser, & Henig, 2002) and in "counseling out" low-performing or challenging students who do not 'fit' in the charter environment (Welner, 2013)—practices that disproportionately harm particular racial groups and can be inhibited with increased transparency and compliance measures.

While these researchers have successfully interrogated the segregation patterns occurring under school choice and expressed its civil rights implications, they have typically operationalized civil rights through quantitative measures that reflect the tangible or physical impact of these reforms on communities of color. More recently, researchers have begun examining the discursive invocation of civil rights rhetoric by market-oriented reformers and considered its broader implications. On one level, these studies expose the changing conceptualization of civil rights under market-based reform. For example, Scott (2011, 2013b) argued that market reformers have appropriated and reframed civil rights from a concept that elevated communitarian goals to one that emphasizes individual attainment and empowerment. In emphasizing outcome-based data (e.g., test scores, college attendance) and school choice, she argues market reformers assert the importance of individual success and redefine equity in individualist terms, which can inhibit the advancement of competing policies that acknowledge and address structural impediments to equitable schooling (Scott, 2013b). Scott goes on to state:

While school choice is often part of the much-discussed 'unfinished work of the Civil Rights Movement' for which market reformers claim to advocate, their efforts do little to expand access to deliberation, power, and resources for communities of color and their allies beyond the ability to choose schools. (p. 9)

Here, Scott suggests that in their emphasis on individualism and performance, market reformers also neglect less quantifiable outcomes including improved democratic processes, increased decision-making opportunities, and access to robust and well-resourced learning environments for which traditional civil rights advocates have fought.

In addition to examining the changing conceptualization of civil rights, other scholars have investigated how the discourse imparted in market reforms inhibits the ability to advance equity for marginalized racial groups. While varying in the degree to which they frame their analyses explicitly through a civil rights lens, these scholars nonetheless expose how racial discourse and representation are implicated in the development, implementation, and discussions of specific educational policies and how these constructions, in turn, maintain systemic, hierarchical privileges for whites (Au, 2016; Dumas, 2016; Flores, 2016; Gillborn, 2005). To illustrate, in her examination

of Chicago, Lipman (2011) demonstrates how actors with specific business, racial, and social class interests have discursively pathologized race to justify school closure, charter and CMO expansion, and the restructuring of urban space. Similarly, Buras (2011) examined the racial, economic, and spatial dynamics of charter school reform in post-Katrina New Orleans to highlight how race is pathologized in the “strategic assault on black communities by educational entrepreneurs” (p. 296). Other researchers go beyond an examination of specific policies to consider how racial representations are crafted and circulated more broadly in reform movements (Dumas, 2013; Patel, 2016). For instance, in his critical reading of the racial representations advanced in the documentary *Waiting for Superman*, Dumas (2013) argues that the filmmakers reify the logics of neoliberal school reform by reproducing stereotypical understandings of Black families and students as disinterested and culpable for their lack of educational advancement—making it so that only school choosers and those Black families willing to take responsibility for their actions are sympathetic. Overall, these studies, which typically employ the frameworks of critical race theory and critical whiteness, engage in critical, discursive analyses of market-oriented policy efforts, expose the often problematic character of the espoused racial discourse, and in turn, interrogate how the use of these racial constructions can undermine equity and civil rights advancement.

The scholarship examining race, civil rights, and market-based reforms has contributed much to our collective understanding, yet an assessment of the research base reveals important conceptual and methodological gaps. Because much of the research on the intersection of race, civil rights, and marketized school reform has focused on segregation and its implications for communities of color, the scholarship remains primarily quantitative, and thus, has tended to treat race as a variable, neglecting the racialization process itself (Omi & Winant, 1994; Powell, 2012). A smaller subset of the scholarship has examined discursive and racialization processes amid market reforms and demonstrated the manner in which problematic constructions of racial groups and narrow conceptualizations of civil rights are crafted and circulated. The purpose of this study is to build upon the emerging discourse-focused body of literature using the tools and methods of CDA. Like other scholars who have examined discourse and educational policy (Ball, 2012; Taylor, 1997; Taylor, Lingard, Rizvi, & Henry, 1997), the aforementioned subset of studies are influenced by general theoretical perspectives of discourse. While this approach illuminates struggles for meaning in the policy arena, it typically does not generate a detailed and systematic linguistic analyses that reveals the way power and race are formulated in everyday language (Taylor, 2004). In examining Perry and Duncan’s racial constructions through CDA in this study, I attend to the micro-level manner in which these market reformers discursively construct the racial identities of their constituents and what assumptions those constructions convey. While examining the coherence of racial construction and civil rights rhetoric invoked by two individuals in the sector is not generalizable, this study provides insights into how racial ideologies and social constructions are reproduced at the micro-level, how they complicate broader discourse patterns of civil rights, and how they potentially undermine educational policies that aim to redress persistent racial inequities.

## **Identifying Racial Discourse in the Era of Colorblindness: A Conceptual Framework**

To examine Perry and Duncan’s discursive, racial constructions, I utilize a framework that attends to the often nuanced manner in which race is discussed in the current racial context. In the following sections, I provide a discussion of what discourse does in regards to race and race-based power relations and why an examination of educational leaders’ racial discourse patterns is imperative. I, then, turn to a discussion of colorblindness, the dominant racial ideology that characterizes the current racial context in the US, and explain its particular presence in market

ideology. Finally, I describe the linguistic devices described by Bonilla-Silva (2002, 2006) and van Dijk (1997, 2002) that guide this discursive analysis.

## Discourse and Racial Ideology

This study begins from the assumption that race is not a static categorization, but rather a social construction that continuously evolves. Understandings of race and racial groups result from sociohistorical processes as well as contemporary human interactions and forces that construct, reify, or redefine race and racial identity in social thought (Haney López, 1994; Omi & Winant, 1994). Discourse is instrumental in conveying racialized ideas and can reveal the often-subtle ways that understandings of racial groups are articulated through language and messaging (Bonilla-Silva, 2006).

At a fundamental level, race involves discourse. Race and racialized identities are largely formulated by texts, imagery, and language and generate broader social understandings of race (Jiwani & Richardson, 2011, p. 242).<sup>2</sup> Race and understandings of racial groups are also learned, acquired, and legitimated in discourse and representation practices (Hall, 1997; van Dijk, 2002) and thus involves symbolic power—or “the power to mark, assign, and classify” (Hall, 1997, p. 259). This study considers how prominent educational leaders engage in this *discursive racialization*, or the manner in which discourse constructs and extends racial meaning to marginalized racial groups (Omi & Winant, 1994), and how their discourse can complicate broader policy efforts and civil rights invocations.

Racial ideology, or the manner in which a dominant racial group mobilizes rationalizations and structures to justify the status quo (Bonilla-Silva, 2006), is the driving force shaping discourse patterns. Ideologies themselves are both social and cognitive. They include socially created frameworks for organizing the “cognition shared by members of social groups, organizations, or institutions” (van Dijk, 1995, p. 18) that maintain societal interests and positions while providing explanations for individual lived experiences. As a pervasive force, ideology dominates thru efforts to legitimate the status quo, disguise itself as something other than domination or supremacy, or naturalize race-based power relations that are historically and socially created (Leonardo, 2003). Racial discourse is a one vehicle by which this ideology takes form and becomes intelligible (*ibid*).

Racial ideologies are comprised of frames and discursive strategies, which serve as ways of understanding and explaining the causes and solutions to personal and social problems occurring along racial lines (Lewis, 2004). In other words, these discursive devices help individuals makes sense of race relations and existing racial inequalities (Omi & Winant, 2009), which can generate real, tangible consequences. As Frankenberg (1993) notes, discursive ideas are “made material in the design and creation of institutions and shaping daily practices, interpersonal interactions, and social relations” (p. 266). In providing mental structures for explaining the day-to-day realities of race, discourse necessarily shapes the way individuals behave, the goals they seek, and the plans they make (Lakoff, 2004). The tangible effects of racialized structures and race’s discursive dimensions are thus interconnected. As discourse shapes race, racial identities, and the relations of power, it guides action and ideas that influence everyday experiences and institutional arrangements.

For these reasons, it is critical to understand how racial discourse is constructed and circulated by educational leaders, for their racial frames guide the manner in which they envision

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<sup>2</sup> While a discursive analysis of race and racism is integral given the discursive production of racial realities and understandings, this is not to say that the race and racism can be reduced to a language or communication problem but rather to call attention to the way that race and racism manifests itself in discourse and the social understandings that result from the frequent immersion in it (van Dijk, 1993a).

and enact educational policies. Their discourse informs policy formation and implementation and ultimately, the “public imagination of what is deemed ‘effective’ or ‘good’ policy, and what counts as ‘fair’ or ‘just’ in the distribution of educational resources” (Dumas, Dixson, & Mayorga, 2016, p. 4). The ideologically driven discourse that is crafted and circulated by prominent leaders also represents an important tool for asserting influence over one’s audience (Cohen-Vogel & Hunt, 2007). It relies on persuasive strategies to make particular constructions of reality more appealing than others (Suspitsyna, 2010, citing Edwards & Nicoll, 2001) and conveys a “common sense” within which a proposed reform appears as an appropriate solution to an identified problem (Ball, 2007). Overall, leaders maintain preferential access to varying groups and constituencies and are better positioned to circulate this discourse and inform policies and organizational practices, which influence day-to-day inner workings of the U.S. educational system.

## The U.S.’s Colorblind Context

Because of race’s socially constructed nature, dominant racial ideologies and their supporting logics have evolved over time. Today, the prevailing racial ideology is no longer aligned with early sociological theories of race that understood the concept as biological (Omi & Winant, 1994), but rather emphasizes the socially constructed nature of race in arguing for an elimination of the category. Scholars have described this racial ideology as colorblindness (Haney López, 2014; Leonardo, 2007; Wells, 2014). Gaining dominance as institutional reforms aimed at ameliorating racial inequality were being dismantled (Lewis, 2004), colorblindness is based on the notion that race is no longer a factor in the life of an individual, society, or its institutional structures given the social gains made during the civil rights movement (Bonilla-Silva, 2003; Haney López, 2006; Powell, 2008). Because of race’s decreased salience, this perspective posits that the best way to eliminate racism is to eradicate the use of racial references and categories. Racialized subjects are thus individualized and extended egalitarian values by individuals and institutions, and any challenge or inability for individuals of color to achieve success is rooted in their cultural or individual deficiency, not in egalitarian, race-neutral societal institutions (Bonilla-Silva, 2003). Furthermore, any instances of racism are considered to be overt acts of discrimination by individual racists. As Brown et al. (2003) explain:

Racists are characterized...as deeply prejudiced individuals who express “raw racism,” “people who can and will do horrendous things”.... Nonracists, on the other hand, are said to accept the principles of the civil rights movement and display few, if any, traces of prejudice. In this view, racists today are the exception and nonracists the rule. (p. 53)

As the authors assert, this racial ideology assumes an ahistorical framework that obscures continued patterns of institutionalized racism, thus serving to naturalize racialized patterns of inequity.

While colorblindness obscures structural racism and privatizes racist acts, it also serves as a way to deflect responsibility or discomfort when one considers one’s own racial positioning. As Brayboy, Castagno, and Maughan (2007) argue, “colorblindness can be a defense mechanism used by those in power because of the direct connection between race relations (historical, present, and future) and conflict and shame” (p. 175). With a colorblind stance, individuals can deny the notion that they project negative racial views into the world. They do so on the basis that racism emanates from overtly prejudiced individuals and through allusions to their belief in egalitarianism and equal opportunity for all people. In doing so, they place the onus of responsibility for societal inequities onto communities of color by drawing upon cultural arguments of racial difference to subtly derogate marginalized racial groups. Thus, one can understand colorblindness as an ideology in

service of what van Dijk (1992) calls *the ideological square*. This conceptual tool suggests that race discourse is characterized by a “positive self-presentation and a simultaneous negative other-presentation” (Jiwani & Richardson, 2011, p. 243). By minimizing the salience of race and projecting responsibility for racial inequality onto racist individuals and communities of color, those espousing colorblindness are able to absolve themselves of responsibility, dissociate themselves from systemic racism, and maintain a positive self-image. All the while, these same individuals often project negative stereotypes of people of color that serve to perpetrate negative racial sentiments.

While individuals of various racial groups can espouse colorblindness, it necessarily serves to maintain the racial position of whites by leaving institutionalized forms of racism that disproportionately benefit them intact while discursively and structurally erasing them as a dominant group. For this reason, some have argued that colorblindness is less about an unwillingness to acknowledge race but more of a selective elevation of whites. For instance, in his analysis of No Child Left Behind, Leonardo (2007) notes how whiteness acts as a “hidden referent” (p.268) to which all others are compared, giving “license to declare students of color failures under a presumed-to-be fair system” (p. 269). Similarly, the legal scholar John A. Powell (2012) notes how whites have historically employed a hidden white norm in their Enlightenment ideals of objectivity, rationalism, and universalism—principles used to ‘other’ and justify societal positions of racial groups. In both instances, these scholars suggest that colorblindness does not ignore race but rather subtly and actively centers whiteness.

### **Colorblindness & Market Reform: How Do They Intersect?**

While some rightfully argue that the hegemonic nature of colorblindness as a racial ideology means that it permeates all parts of society, this ideology is particularly relevant in the market-oriented education reform effort. Many researchers examining the intersection of race and market orientation have highlighted the manner in which this sector constructs race (Goldberg, 2009; Hutchison, 2011; Kapoor, 2013; Roberts & Mahtani, 2010). Kapoor (2013) suggest that as reformers espouse commitments to individual choice and competition, they simultaneously adhere to the individualization of race in the public arena, mirroring market shifts to increased privatization. As Goldberg (2009) argues in his description of what he calls racial neoliberalism, market-oriented reformers describe “racism without race...the silencing of racial structures in any discourses of race so that if acknowledged at all it is merely as a reflection of the attitude of an individual” (p. 361). Thus, in their promotion of privatization efforts, they tend to espouse an ahistorical perspective that minimizes explicit racial references, asking individuals to give up race without addressing the legacy of racist structures.

This move to privatize race and obscure structural racism is advanced and solidified as stories of people of color “beating the odds” or demonstrating “grit” are circulated and valorized. In privatizing racial problems, market reformers construct minority groups who are unable to beat the odds as culturally deficient, often pathologizing them to further their own interests (Hutchison, 2011). In this way, the racial constructions promoted by market reformers mirrors the patterns of colorblind ideology. In both colorblind ideology and racial neoliberalism, actors individualize racism and pathologize racial groups through the use of cultural arguments. Thus, the racial discourse patterns of market-oriented educational actors, including the focal cases in this study, should be examined through this ideological frame in order to consider the extent to which colorblind frames co-exist and ultimately complicate civil rights invocations.

## Mining Civil Rights Rhetoric for Racial Construction

This study investigates the racial constructions of two market-oriented education reformers through a synthesis of Bonilla-Silva's (2002, 2006) and van Dijk's (2002, 2007) approaches to elucidating colorblind racial discourse and its subtleties. Bonilla-Silva (2002, 2006) investigated the manner in which colorblindness, or *colorblind racism* as he terms it, manifests itself discursively. Specifically, he noted the linguistic devices whites used in a series of interviews to safely express their prejudicial views of people of color. These devices included an avoidance of direct racial language (i.e., code language) when speaking about people of color and the increased presence of verbal incoherence when communicating ideas that could be perceived as racial. Moreover, he noted the semantic moves that whites made to safely express racial views, using phrases like "I'm not racist, but..." or "I'm not black, so I don't know..." Finally, he noted the use of diminutives (e.g., little, kinda), which serve to soften the impact of racially charged statements, and the role of projection, or the placement of racial motivations unto individual racists or homophilic tendencies among communities of color.

While Bonilla-Silva's framework provides a strong overarching categorization through which to examine how colorblind individuals express racialized views, van Dijk's extensive research into the linguistic moves used to express racist views is a strong supplement in that it names the micro-level semantic, syntactic, and illocutionary moves used to express subtle racial views in this colorblind context. To illustrate, van Dijk (2002) provides enhanced clarity to Bonilla-Silva's discussion of verbal incoherence by naming the linguistic devices of false starts, hesitations, filler language, and general local incoherence (i.e., mixed messages, unclear statements) that often maintain positive self-presentation alongside the derogation of racial groups in these communicative moment. He also calls attention to local semantics and syntax, which supplement Bonilla-Silva's colorblind devices of avoiding direct racial language and using semantic, distancing moves. Van Dijk denotes the use of euphemisms and pronouns as a means to signal the other as well as nominalization and the selective usage of active and passive voice when articulating racialized comments.

Table 1 provides an overview of the linguistic devices used in this study to analyze the degree to which the two leaders embrace colorblind ideology. In applying Bonilla-Silva and van Dijk's discursive frameworks to this analysis, this study elucidates the nuanced manner in which these educational leaders subtly construct race and racial groups in their comments—constructions that can serve to undermine and complicate their civil rights invocations amid the reforms and actions they promote.

Table 1

*Bonilla-Silva and van Dijk's Linguistic Devices of Race Talk: A Framework*

Bonilla-Silva (2002, 2006)	van Dijk (1997, 2002)	Example
Avoidance of direct racial language	Euphemisms Use of pronouns ( <i>to signal Other</i> ) Imagery ( <i>invoking racial images</i> )	-Urban, low-income, at-risk -“ <u>Those</u> kids” -Martin Luther King, Jr., Rodney King
Semantic moves	Disclaimers Lexicon/Word Choice Passive vs. active voice ( <i>de-emphasizing agency with racially charged statements</i> )	-“I don’t know, but...” -Terrorist vs. Freedom-Fighter -“Shots were fired...” “The discrimination felt by minorities is...”
Role of projection	Disclaimer Passive vs. active voice ( <i>de-emphasizing agency with racially charged statements</i> ) Nominalization ( <i>agentless comments</i> )	- “I know people have that idea, but I didn’t...” -All I knew of that place came out of...
Use of diminutives	Lexicon/Mitigation Sounds	-Kinda, a little, sorta -hedges, -Rising intonation
Verbal incoherence	Hesitations/false starts/errors Filler language Sounds Local incoherence ( <i>i.e., mixed messages; unclear statements</i> )	- um, guttural, laugh

## Methodology

### Critical Discourse Analysis

To investigate Perry and Duncan's racial constructions, I employ critical discourse analysis (CDA) as means of connecting their race talk to broader patterns of colorblindness. Specifically, CDA can be defined as an investigation of “the properties of what people say or write to accomplish social, political, or cultural acts in various local contexts as well as within broader frameworks of societal structure and culture” (van Dijk, 1997, p. 1). In other words, this analytic approach allows for an examination of how micro-level linguistic, textual, and illocutionary communicative acts reproduce, resist, or reformulate broader ideological factors that may systematically influence text or talk (van Dijk, 1997a). It links macro- and microlevel discourse by positing that verbal interaction reproduces and, at times, resists dominant, discursive patterns and ideologies (Fairclough, 1985, 2003; van Dijk, 1993b, 1997). In assuming the interconnectedness of various levels of language and society, CDA debunks individualistic notions of language and

communication, positions individuals with a power structure (Fairclough, 1992), and thus strives to make “visible the interconnectedness of things...” (Fairclough, 1985, p. 747). Given this study’s purpose in investigating whether Perry and Duncan are reproducing or resisting colorblind discourse patterns, CDA is a highly relevant analytic approach to employ.

The use of CDA to investigate racial discourse patterns also provides key insights for educational policy scholarship. Scholars have employed CDA in educational policy analyses (Falk, 1994; Thomas, 2002; Woodside-Jiron, 2011), yet CDA has typically been under-utilized as a methodological approach in lieu of other traditional quantitative and qualitative approaches, which can provide greater external validity and the ability for generalization. Despite its underutilization and marginalization within the policy analysis field, CDA nonetheless provides important insights into the relationship between language and broader social processes. CDA simultaneously facilitates a linguistic and social analysis, which can reveal the nuanced and subtle manner in which power relations are maintained and one way in which policies may fail to mitigate inequities (Taylor, 2004). Rather than presenting policy prescriptions or evaluations that are often characteristic of policy scholarship, CDA can advance “policy knowledge” that provides relevant “information and ideas useful in framing, deepening our understanding of, and/or enriching our conceptualization of policy problems” (Dumas & Anderson, 2014, p.8).

## Case Descriptions

**Joe Perry.** Growing up and attending college in the Pacific Northwest, Joe Perry has maintained strong affiliations with various market-oriented groups and organizations throughout his career. Perry, a white male in his 30s, began his career as a teacher in the late 2000s when he relocated to Southern California to begin teaching as a Teach for America corps member. After fulfilling his two-year commitment at the traditional public school in which he was placed, he quickly transitioned to teaching in the charter sector, working as a middle school teacher at a prominent CMO that operated many schools in the region. During his seven-year career with the organization, he ultimately worked his way from classroom teacher to the Director of Technology and Entrepreneurship for the CMO’s network of schools in Northern California. In his leadership position, Perry was charged with forming organizational policies related to personalized and blended learning efforts and supporting teachers and staff in policy enactment through professional development and other coaching efforts. During his tenure, his efforts reached over 100 faculty and central staff members who in turn translated their learning to reach the network’s population of over 3,000 students—95% of which were students of color.

**Arne Duncan.** Before ascending to his role as the U.S. Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan began his career in the realm of educational leadership working with nonprofits in Chicago in the 1990s. During that time, he gained a positive reputation for his role in establishing and maintaining a successful and broadly celebrated elementary school. This reputation and visibility ultimately facilitated his ascendance to the role of Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Chicago Public Schools from 2001 to 2009 (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). During his tenure as CEO, he built upon the legacy of the high-stakes accountability regime that preceded his leadership by instituting a variety of reforms that further solidified market logic and reforms into public school governance, including the expansion of school choice initiatives and the implementation of school turnarounds (Lipman, 2003; Lipman & Haines, 2007). In his position as the U.S. Secretary of Education, Duncan continued to champion these market-oriented reforms and incentivized states to adopt these reform platforms to receive federal funding through the Race to the Top initiative (U.S. Department of Education, 2009).

**Case significance.** Both Perry and Duncan represent relevant case studies to explore the phenomenon of racial construction amidst invocations of civil rights rhetoric. They represent organizational leaders clearly situated within the market-oriented education reform sector. Long-time participation in, and, in Duncan's case the promotion of these types of policies, makes them ideal cases given their in-depth participation in this institutional context that has characteristically employed marketized constructions of civil rights and an attentiveness to colorblindness. In addition, by virtue of their organizational positions, both Perry and Duncan exhibit a high degree of visibility and power within their respective institutions, allowing their ideas and discourse to reach broader audiences. For Perry, his work in the CMO central office required him to engage with teachers, students, and principals across the region's schools. For Duncan, he received substantial media and policy maker attention as the prominent voice on educational issues in the Obama administration, thus enabling his ideas and discourse to reach national audiences. Given the potential impact and reach of their words, it is imperative to examine how these respective leaders espouse in racial construction alongside civil rights invocations to consider what messages are being conveyed and circulated.

Beyond their power, reach, and embeddedness in the market-oriented educational sector, Duncan and Perry are also significant cases to explore because of their racial demographics. As white males, they reflect the dominant racial profile of leaders within the broader market-oriented reform movement and the broader racial hierarchy. While researchers have documented the challenges in examining whiteness and race consciousness (Leonardo, 2004, 2009), it remains critical to investigate whites' racial views given their "social location and their status within the racial hierarchy" (Lewis, 2004b, p. 624). Thus, Perry and Duncan represent strong focal cases given their positionality within the market-oriented educational sector and their racialized position and status within the hierarchy.

## Data Collection

The data in this study are derived from two interviews, one for each of the focal cases. In Perry's case, this interview was conducted in conjunction with a larger project that investigated the racial politics surrounding CMO growth and sustainability efforts in one urban midsized district in Northern California. In this study, I interviewed a variety of CMO central office leaders and key stakeholders to explore the strategies they employed to secure support from families, donors, and teachers and the degree to which they invoked race or race-based messaging in their efforts. While many of the questions in the semi-structured interview protocol pertained to current organizational efforts, preliminary questions focused on the participant's motivation for entering the teaching profession, their experience in working predominantly with communities of color, and the challenges they faced as a result of any racial mismatch. It is these portions of the Perry interview that I draw upon for analysis. The full interview was audio-recorded and approximately one hour in length. The entire audio recording was then transcribed using F5 transcription software. I listened and refined the transcription three complete times to ensure that accurate intonation, pausing, and wording were captured on the final transcript with the transcription conventions. (See Table A1 in the Appendix.) In selecting segments of the interview for deeper analysis, I chose an instance that reflected an unprovoked moment during the interview when Perry invoked civil rights rhetoric to describe his work. While the selection of one segment can be critiqued as an aberration within the interview, I chose to focus on this particular portion because it allowed me to directly analyze the racial constructions that were conveyed within the context of invoking civil rights, which is the aim of this study.

In Duncan's case, I transcribed and analyzed a 20-minute, public interview conducted by Michel Martin with National Public Radio (NPR) wherein she asked the former Secretary of

Education to discuss a variety of topics including the gender achievement gap, the role of race in education, and the current state of educational reform in the US (The Atlantic, 2010). Of particular interest for this study are Martin's questions regarding Duncan's reaction to the documentary *Waiting for Superman* and his comments asserting that the film signified a Rosa Parks moment. While Scott (2013a) has previously interrogated Duncan's "Rosa Parks" reference and its broader implications, I analyzed several comments he made in explaining how the film signified the continuation of Parks' legacy for accompanying racial constructions to juxtapose the two discourses. In following the procedures conducted with the transcription and analysis of Perry's segment, the full interview was transcribed using F5 software and refined after multiple listens to ensure that accurate intonation, pausing, and wording were captured on the final transcript using the list of conventions. (See Table A1 in Appendix for full list.)

## Data Analysis

To analyze the racial construction present within invocations of civil rights, I uploaded the annotated portions of the transcripts to Dedoose, an online qualitative software analysis program, and deductively coded for the linguistic moves identified within Bonilla-Silva and van Dijk's framework (see Table 1). This deductive approach allowed me to see the degree to which the identified discursive devices were present in the speakers' comments and to identify specific examples from the discourse that aligned with the framework constructs for deeper analysis. Some of the codes applied included euphemisms for racial groups, the presence of othering pronouns, invocations of race-based imagery, the use of disclaimers and diminutives, the use of passive voice, and instances of verbal incoherence (e.g., hesitations, errors, filler language, mixed messages). After this deductive analysis, I downloaded the coded transcripts and engaged in an assessment of the patterns and the overall argumentation presented in the speaker's comments. In this portion of the analysis, I considered how race was implicitly or explicitly discussed and the characterizations of racial groups that were conveyed through the research-based constructs that guide this study, ultimately elucidating themes that were expressed through multiple instances and mechanisms in their commentary. Because my analysis was based upon a detailed interpretation of the speakers' discursive patterns which can generate issues related to internal validity (Jaipal-Jamani, 2014; Tonkiss, 2004), I drew my conclusions based on the convergence of the speakers' comments with the Bonilla-Silva and van Dijk's constructs and the consistency in which the ideas were conveyed in the cases' discourse to increase the study's validity.

## Findings

### Joe's Racial Construction

For the purposes of this study, a single segment from Perry's longer interview was annotated and analyzed for racial construction. These comments were uttered in response to him having situated his work as a teacher in the context of civil rights work and social justice. When prompted to elaborate upon the connection between social justice, civil rights, and his work as a teacher, he responded in the following manner:

- 1        Yeah, I /really didn't have much, of uh, a background knowledge on that.
- 2        I /did have an emphas- my- I MAJORED in /history, um,
- 3        with an emphasis in gay studies,
- 4        So, really understand.. um..social justice from that /perspective
- 5        =but DIDN'T in terms of like, poverty issues and stuff like at
- 6        =Outside of just having, you know, a fascination with the Kennedys

7        But, nothing like as to what is actually going /on.  
8        U:m, and really, all I knew of, South LA, and came out of,  
9        you know, my listening to Gangster /rap in the early /90s,  
10      And, you know, the the /OJ, case and the LA /Riots and Rodney /King  
11      =and like that's all I knew of /LA.  
12      So, VERY /stereotypical,  
13      um, ideas in my head of what I was going to be going into.  
14      Um, and../really, like.../wasn't../totally, like, bought in of /like I'm-  
15      this idea th- th- that you know,  
16      =I know people have, HAVE that idea  
17      =but I didn't have the idea of like  
18      =I'm gonna go sa:ve these kids or anything like that.  
19      I really was like, you know, this is, a job that I might enjoy /doing.

In the context of his discussion of civil rights and education, Perry employs a variety of devices that reflect a colorblind perspective. First and foremost, he reflects a strong reluctance to use explicit racial language though his comments slowly reveal that he envisions civil rights work as a racialized project. Initially, he frames this civil rights work in terms of “poverty” as he notes his lack of knowledge of social justice issues in this area in line 5. Yet, he quickly reveals his racialized construction in lines 8-10 of this script, where he invokes racial imagery to describe the community where he taught. Specifically, he notes that all he knew about South Los Angeles were a result of Gangster rap, the OJ case, the LA Riots, and Rodney King—notorious images and events that necessarily index communities of color. Thus, while Perry initially presented the idea of poverty as a key element of social justice, his reference to these racialized events and genres reveal the fact that he considers race in the discussion of the civil rights work he is doing. Moreover, while Perry’s comments suggest he is connecting the idea of civil rights work and racialized communities, he continues to avoid direct racial language. In his initial reference to civil right issues and later in his discussion of racial events and genres, he makes no direct references to race.

More telling in this segment is the presentation of South LA as a pathologized, racialized space. Even though Perry candidly admits that events like the LA Riots and Gangster rap made him think stereotypically of this community, the use of the word stereotype reveals that he held negative preconceptions of the context and what he “was going to be going into.” While Perry does not reveal the specific nature of his stereotypical thinking, making references to the riots and Gangster rap indexes notions of violence and gang culture in South LA. In addition to the negative connotation conjured by the images he presented, the manner in which Perry verbally expresses this information reveals a sense of hesitation, mimicking a pattern of rising intonation when presenting sensitive comments that he exhibited throughout the interview. Finally, Perry’s negative perceptions of South LA as a racialized space are articulated with his comment in lines 17-18 where he notes that he did not hold the mentality of needing to go into this community and “save these kids.” Perry turns to this idea of saving these kids of his own accord after presenting the negative stereotypes of South LA, implying that one might associate these children’s life experiences with a need for “saving.” In this way, Perry signals the social imaginary of what Leonardo and Hunter (2009) call the “urban jungle,” or an urban space “teeming with black, brown, and yellow bodies, which are poor and dirty, criminal, and dangerous” (p. 154) and necessarily in need of behavioral and cultural reconditioning. Overall, Perry’s discussion of South LA projects a negative construction of this racialized space. While not explicitly stating the negative social elements of the space, it is implied through his reference to certain events, thus engaging in a negative presentation of the Other, or “outgroup derogation” (van Dijk, 2002, p. 151).

While his reference to racial stereotypes projects a negative image of racial groups in South LA, Perry simultaneously attempts to save-face or project a positive self-presentation within this same segment. First, the fact that he emphatically admits to holding these stereotypical ideas in line 12 is his first attempt to reconstruct a positive self-image. He expresses what Eagleton (2007) calls “enlightened false consciousness,” whereby he openly asserts his awareness and presence of racial ideology and stereotypes as means to establish a sense of autonomy from these ideas. This effort is accompanied by what he discursively constructs as a passive acquisition of these racial ideas. Specifically, he positions himself as a passive recipient of these stereotypes via his attention to popular culture and televised news in lines 8-10. In essence, Perry states that his understanding of these communities “came out of” what they were projecting to the world. Thus, stereotypes and negative perceptions of communities of color are a result of their own action, thus absolving Perry of agency in crafting these mental images of communities of color and serving to project responsibility. Finally, Perry attempts to re-establish a positive self-image after the presentation of racial stereotypes by projecting beliefs onto other teachers who moved to South LA to teach. Specifically, he uses a type of disclaimer that van Dijk (2002) calls a transfer whereby he denies that he had any sense of trying to go in and save “these kids.” In lines 14-19, he emphatically notes that individuals hold this sentiment, but that he is not one of them. Instead, Perry reiterates his self-interested motivation for entering the teaching profession as something he might “enjoy doing,” thus attempting to refute any negative opinions of him after the racialized construction of South LA. It is important to note that as Perry transitions to introducing this disclaimer, his speech is incoherent; that is, his utterances contain a higher frequency of hedges, filler words, and incomplete words. The discursive incoherence, particularly in lines 14-15, aligns with Bonilla-Silva’s (2003) description of race talk among whites. Specific, he notes:

Rhetorical incoherence (e.g., grammatical mistakes, lengthy pauses, repetition, etc.) is part of all natural speech. Nevertheless, the degree of incoherence increases. And because the new racial climate in America forbids the open expression of racially based feelings, views, and positions, when whites discuss issues that make them feel uncomfortable, they become almost incomprehensible. (pp. 58-59)

While Perry becomes more coherent as he finishes his thoughts on in this segment, his initial incoherence suggests the acknowledgement of and discomfort with the racialized nature of the comments he previously stated.

**Summary.** After situating his work as an educator within the scope of civil rights advancement, Perry subsequently projected negatively connoted racial constructions and deficit perspectives of communities of color in South LA. While he represents himself as someone who does not hold those negative beliefs, he nonetheless communicates and circulates these ideas safely via colorblind linguistic devices. Specifically, Perry actively attempts to avoid racial terminology despite his invocation of negative race-laden imagery. In addition, his speech reflects a high degree of incoherence characteristic of race talk and attempts to lessen the impact of racially charged statements with rising intonation, an elocutionary device that lends doubt to articulated statements. Furthermore, he uses semantic moves to assert his nonparticipation in the development of negative racial thinking. Overall, his comments demonstrate how allusions to civil rights can coexist alongside the circulation of negative racial constructions.

## Duncan's Racial Construction

The analyzed segments below contain the remarks U.S. Secretary Duncan made during an interview with NPR's Michel Martin after being explicitly asked to justify his comments regarding the film *Waiting for Superman* constituting a "Rosa Parks moment." He explained:

1        Well, well, it's it's starting to happen.  
 2        I think there's something that's really powerful about images,  
 3        and we can /talk about it,  
 4        and try to be /eloquent,  
 5        and people can write fantastic /pieces,  
 6        but when you look at the images,  
 7        And when I think the country looked in Rosa Parks' /eyes,  
 8        and saw this, /dignified, /elegant woman,  
 9        who was just trying to get home from work and was /tired,  
 10       and wanted to sit on the bus.  
 11       I think the country recognized that something was radically wrong.  
 12       And I think as the country looks at the images  
 13       of Daisy and Anthony and the other children in the movie and their parents,  
 14       and look at their DESPERATE hope for a better education,  
 15       and how DIFFICULT that is  
 16       =and how WE as a COUNTRY are letting them down.  
 17       You CAN'T look in those children's eyes and those parents' eyes  
 18       =and walk away and do nothing.  
 19       You HAVE to get off the sidelines  
 20       =And that's why I call it a Rosa Parks moment.  
 21       I think the IMAGES are so COMPELLING.  
 22       These are REAL moms, REAL dads, REAL children,  
 23       who unless something changes,  
 24       their children will get a a horrendous education.  
 25       And that is just morally unacceptable,  
 26       and that, to me, is the is the equivalent.

After these initial comments, Martin asked Duncan a follow-up question: "...Given the fact that elites always find or buy themselves out, what is the engine that is going to make it different this time than all the other times that people have promised change?" He explained:

27       It wasn't just African /Americans who looked at Rosa Parks  
 28       =and said this wasn't good /enough.  
 29       WHITE folks looked at that situation,  
 30       and said something's wrong with our country.  
 31       And the /elites,  
 32       folks in this /room,  
 33       folks in /Washington,  
 34       when you look at that movie  
 35       =and you start to understand what those families are going through,  
 36       it's NOT just about what's right for YOUR children,  
 37       it's what's right for our NATION'S children.  
 38       And, that's, I think, the, you know,  
 39       the /tipping point we are starting to approach.

40 WE'RE not THERE YET,  
 41 but we've moved a HECK of a lot uh further to that tipping point  
 42 =than I would have thought possible.

In justifying his comments regarding the parallels between Rosa Parks, the civil rights movement, and the current educational reform context, Duncan constructs race in a nuanced way. First, he achieves nuance and subtlety through the relative absence of explicit racial language in his comments. Despite the fact that naming Rosa Parks, Daisy, Anthony, and the other families in the film conjures images of racial segregation, the race-focused civil rights movement, and continued evidence of racial inequality, he makes very few references to race. For instance, his initial response to this line of questioning in lines 1-26 is completely devoid of references to race or racial categorizations. Even his description of Rosa Parks herself in lines 7-10 is presented in a de-racialized manner. Specifically, Duncan refers to the “country” as looking into Parks’ “eyes” and seeing a “dignified, elegant woman who was just trying to get home from work and was tired and wanted to sit on the bus.” In calling attention to Parks’ eyes, he discursively moves beyond skin color to alternatively attend to this physical feature, thus downplaying the relevance of race.

The recognition of Parks’ dignity, elegance, and basic needs for rest and her subsequent mistreatment is presented as the primary justification for the country’s outrage and ability to connect with the movement. Her actions, which she and the NAACP strategically orchestrated as one of several efforts to initiate social and legal battles on behalf of advancing racial equality, are absent from the description of her legacy and instead attributed to her desire to satisfy her personal needs. Similar to his de-racialized descriptions of Parks, Duncan also describes the parents and students who are the focus of the documentary in a de-racialized manner. Despite the fact that all but one of the focal cases in the documentary were families of color, he avoids racial descriptors and again emphasizes how the country “CAN’T look in those children’s eyes and those parents’ eyes” (line 17-18) and remain idle. Also, while there was one white, suburban family represented in the film, the two students he names specifically—Daisy and Anthony—are students of color, allowing Duncan again to allude to race without explicitly naming it as a social barrier shared among Parks and the individuals in the film.

While Duncan’s initial comments were devoid of explicit racial references his follow-up statement in lines 27-42 include overt racial categorizations. In line 27, he openly acknowledges African Americans as a distinct group who struggled in solidarity with Rosa Parks, thus revealing the racial undertones in his initial comments. Moreover, he stresses the inclusion and importance of “white folks” in the struggle, suggesting that their mobilization was the tipping point in advancing the movement. This suggestion is expressed as he draws parallels between the ‘collaboration’ of African Americans and white individuals in the civil rights movement and the potential mobilization of “elites” in the audience and Washington more broadly who will be motivated to act by the plight of the highlighted families and students. It is important to note that as Duncan draws parallels from the civil rights movement to the educational context, he again de-racializes the actors. He moves away from describing actors in racial terms, and instead, uses the term “elite” to designate the individuals of influence and power in the room. Given the parallels he explicitly drew between the civil rights movement and the current movement for educational change, one could infer that “elite” serves as a euphemism for the dominant racial group—whites.

Alongside the racial commentary embedded in Duncan’s statements is an equally subtle derogation of the people of color to which he was alluding. In particular, Duncan uses words like “helpless” and “desperate” to describe the individuals of color and their ineffectual struggles to obtain educational opportunities. For instance, in his description of the families in *Waiting for Superman* in lines 14-16, he stresses the students’ and parents’ “DESPERATE hope for a better

education" and "how DIFFICULT that is." These depictions, which imply a sense of futility and passivity, are immediately followed by the claim that "WE as a COUNTRY are letting them down." While the inefficacy of the government and educational agencies is debatable, juxtaposing student and parental impotence against the agency that "we as a country" have characterizes the individuals of color in the film in a particular way. The "we" in his statement suggests the depicted families and students are *not* members of the broader collective that has the means and will to enact true change. Furthermore, the depicted passivity of people of color is reiterated with his description of "white folks" in the struggle for civil rights (lines 27-30). In his depiction, the African-American community appears impotent in bringing about change. That is, it was insufficient when the Black community alone suggested that racial segregation "wasn't good enough." Duncan verbally stresses that the inclusion of whites seemed to provide the impetus and agency to mobilize the country for change. In this way, these statements, which co-occur with the only explicit reference to racial categorization, suggest a distinction between the agency and efficacy of people of color and whites. While the differential ability for racial groups to influence and mobilize on a large-scale is indeed a reality, this depiction nonetheless circulates this narrative without a description of how this disproportionality is perpetuated systematically.

Beyond the differing levels of agency he ascribes to whites and people of color, his comments also attribute other qualities to whites, which ultimately enable a positive presentation of this racial group. Specifically, whites are characterized as empathetic, benevolent actors who are compelled to bring about change when seeing injustice being enacted. In his words, Duncan suggests that this empathy is evoked as "elites" or whites look "into those children's eyes and those parents' eyes" and feel compelled to action as they are able to ascertain the hope and desperation felt by parents, students, and Parks in their daily realities. White benevolence is conveyed as whites "HAVE to get off the sidelines" (Line 19) and use their agency to bring about real change to address the unacceptable situation. Through his comments, Duncan also attributes these qualities to himself, constructing himself as a moral authority who sees the "morally unacceptable" (Line 25) situation and is compelled to act to address the "horrendous education" (Line 24) that these students and families will inevitably face. While the images Duncan describes can legitimately evoke feelings of empathy and compassion that would move one to act, his words provide an overarching characterization that neglects other motivations that could compel those in positions of power to action. For instance, scholars have argued that many whites and elites advance racial equity only when interest convergence is present (Bell, 1979), meaning that whites are not acting to address systemic inequities solely for moral purposes but rather accommodating policies that advance racial equity when it aligns with their interests. Despite the veracity of these alternative explanations for action, Duncan nonetheless foregoes their discussion in service of providing strong argumentation for his position and constructs whites and elites in this positive manner.

Also of note is the manner in which Duncan discursively asserts a particular type of racialized person who is worthy of garnering attention and support. For instance, in describing Rosa Parks with words like "dignified" and "elegant," he implicitly raises questions regarding the deservedness of those who do not embody similar dispositions. His description of the families in *Waiting for Superman* as having a "desperate hope for a better education" in the face of fruitless persistence to find a solution adds an additional layer of characterization to the worthy individual of color. In addition to the decorum exhibited by Parks, he characterizes the deserving individual as someone who embodies a strong moral and work ethic, yet maintains a level of desperation and helplessness despite their persistence. While one cannot infer from Duncan's words that individuals who do not embody these characteristics are unworthy of support, the absence of broader descriptions of the types of families and individuals of color around which to mobilize creates the

space for this interpretation. Overall, in advancing this construction of the deserving individual of color, Duncan implicitly derogates others who do not reflect these desired attributes.

**Summary.** While Duncan's comments are generally devoid of verbal incoherence and the use of diminutives, he does employ other colorblind linguistic devices to speak safely about individuals of color. He generally avoids overt racial terminology while using semantic moves like euphemisms, references to figures that conjure racial imagery, and syntactic moves to strategically "other" individuals in a safe manner. Moreover, he subtly circulates a narrative about these marginalized racial groups that characterizes them as deficient, helpless, and passive, and suggests that a particular type of individual is worthy of support. In doing so, Duncan is able to safely derogue the racialized other with minimal references to race in the context of a discussion of advancing civil rights. Simultaneously, he advances a subtle, overarching racial narrative of whites that constructs them as caring, moral, and agentic, thus attributing positive qualities to this racial group that stand in contrast to those attributed to people of color.

## Discussion

### The Prevalence of Colorblind Discourse

In claiming to promote the advancement of civil rights through their educational work, both Perry and Duncan simultaneously espouse a racial discourse that reflects colorblindness and the subtle derogation of marginalized racial groups. Both educational leaders reflect a general reluctance to discuss race and avoid the use of explicit racial language as predicted by Bonilla-Silva's framework. Instead, they invoke race-laden imagery and events, use euphemisms for racial groups, and employ language that draws distinctions between themselves and other racialized groups as a means to conjure racial distinctions without explicitly naming them. More importantly, the use of racial innuendo provides them with a 'safe' space to express potentially harmful racial sentiments. In Perry's case, his references to popular images and noteworthy news events that necessarily index South LA as a racialized space serve to pathologize this space as violent and gang-infested. While more subtle in nature, Duncan's comments circulate negative racialized ideas, ascribing the qualities of helplessness and desperation to marginalized racial groups as well as circulating archetypical racial identities that are worthy of sympathy and support. The safety within which these sentiments were conveyed was created with differing discursive devices. For Perry, he discursively positions himself as a passive recipient of these stereotypes and projects responsibility for the creation and circulation of these ideas onto others. Duncan distances himself from the negative racial ideas he espouses by assuming the position of a moral authority, noting how this reality for individuals of color is "morally unacceptable" and persistently calling individuals to action. In this way, the use of color-blind discourse in these instances enables the leaders to preserve their positive self-image and cater to their white racial frame while reifying negative conceptualizations of marginalized racial groups.

While both leaders do employ colorblind linguistic devices, it is important to acknowledge that they do so in varying degrees. Duncan's comments are generally devoid of verbal incoherence, the projection of racially charged ideas, and the use of diminutives, which Bonilla-Silva and van Dijk's frameworks predict. Conversely, Perry's comments reflect each of Bonilla-Silva's categories of colorblind talk and include an array of the semantic and syntactic devices van Dijk describes. While the data inhibits an analysis of why colorblind language is disproportionately present in Perry's comments, one can consider how the interview setting and the frequency and ease of speaking on educational and racial issues affect how ideas were communicated. Since Duncan is a public educational figure who frequently imparts crafted speeches and discusses educational topics

in front of large audiences, one could assume that he has considerable facility in expressing and conveying his ideas, even those that touch upon socially sensitive topics like race. Moreover, the public nature of his interview may contribute to the decreased presence of colorblind linguistic devices. That is, Duncan could be more inclined to perform normatively and present socially acceptable ideas given the public nature of the interview and his position as a public figure.

### **Considering the Impact of the Leaders' Colorblindness**

Despite differences in the degree to which they employ colorblind discursive moves, Perry and Duncan nonetheless espouse colorblindness and circulate negative racial ideas. On one level, the articulation of this discourse and its accompanying racial narratives aligns with and enables the market-oriented reforms in which the focal leaders support. In discursively minimizing race, the leaders de-emphasize the salience of this social category and its structural presence, allowing for the individualistic approach that characterizes market-based policies. This individualization is particularly present in Duncan's comments as he calls attention to people of color who are struggling to attain success and opportunity through individual action rather than communitarian efforts. Furthermore, the leaders advance subtle characterizations of racial groups that align with many of the cultural arguments that market advocates convey in their efforts. While he actively distances himself from these sentiments, one can still see the construction and circulation of stereotypical, negative characterizations of racial groups in Perry's comments that are often called upon by market reformers in their efforts (Buras, 2011; Lipman, 2011). In contrast, Duncan's construction of deserving individuals of color aligns with lauded cultural attributes of hard work and dedication that undergird market ideology's emphasis on meritocracy and grit. Overall, while the leaders' comments reflect varying levels of attention to individualism, their minimization of race and allusions to culturally based arguments reflect an alignment with market ideology and the manner in which race is conceptualized within it (Goldberg, 2009).

In addition to the manner in which their discourse supplements and reifies market logic, Perry and Duncan's racial constructions can affect their respective organizations and the broader educational policy landscape. For Perry, he frequently engages with a multitude of teachers, students, and other CMO personnel and is a prominent member of the CMO. By virtue of his leadership position, his discourse is elevated and thus potentially held as a standard given his position of power. His espousal of colorblindness and its accompanying narratives has the potential to permeate his comments and interactions with a variety of actors in the organization, both guiding the instructional approaches he promotes and affecting the manner in which his teachers and organizational leaders engage in their day-to-day work. For Duncan, the ramifications may be greater. The former Secretary espoused these constructions publicly in an audio and visual recording for National Public Radio, giving his words greater potential for circulation. Compounding the potential for circulation is the attention his comments regarding *Waiting for Superman* and its parallels to the civil rights movement have received (Allan, 2010; Scott, 2013a). As the lead educational policymaker for several years, his racial construction represented the core ideas upon which educational policy should be based. While Duncan's deficit-laden racial construction was subtle and nuanced, it nonetheless elevated and perpetuated colorblindness and its accompanying narratives to a prominent rhetorical and political level, lending the discourse a sense of legitimacy for many.

Beyond the visibility of their discourse, the obfuscation of race in the leaders' language minimizes the role of race as central problem facing communities and students of color that policy must address. As researchers have shown, race continues to have real, lived consequences that shape the quality of life for people of color (Bernal, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Tate, 1997). Social and institutional structures have generated systematic and disparate accumulation of resources

among racial groups, yielding social, political, and economic consequences for communities of color (Cox, 2000; Mills, 1999; Omi & Winant, 1994; Park, 2000). Neglecting to explicitly discuss or name race-based inequity prevents the development of an authentic discussion regarding the persistent impact of race and how to address racial injustice. In essence, their minimization of race inhibits the educational solutions and policies that they imagine, prescribe, and implement.

Furthermore, the subtle derogation of marginalized racial groups, which coexists with this racial obfuscation, suggests that not only are negative perceptions of racial groups reified through this discourse but that these conceptualizations can serve to inform educational reform development and enactment. For Perry, maintaining a deficit perspective has implications for how he engages with teachers and students. Holding these ideas has potential to negatively affect interactions and relationships with students, teachers, and parents, and can lead to a conscious or subconscious imposition of these ideas and ways of knowing onto individuals. For Duncan, the espousal of deficit-laden perspectives has broader implications. In serving as the nation's leading policymaker, Duncan's way of crafting individuals of color and educational solutions shaped the social and policy context in which states, districts, and schools must operate. His discourse suggests that educational reform must be done on behalf of struggling individuals of color who embody a certain disposition and ethic. This discursive position suggests a form of paternalism that can lead to an imposition of educational reforms onto communities of color with only 'socially acceptable' and 'well behaved' minorities in mind.

### **The Incoherence of Colorblindness and Civil Rights Rhetoric**

When considering these racial constructions in the context of civil rights rhetoric, these race-based deficit perspectives confound the notion of civil rights. The simultaneous espousal of these claims is seemingly incompatible insofar that a verbal commitment to promoting racial justice while avoiding explicit discussions of race inhibits continued attention to racial disparities. In this context, questions of authenticity and commitment to civil rights advancement arise and are only exacerbated when one considers how Perry and Duncan conveyed these ideas. In particular, they presented their race discourse in a way that preserved their own self-images while derogating racialized groups. They distanced themselves from the negatively charged racial commentary and presented themselves as moral authorities who do not engage in racial discrimination. As Leonardo (2003) argues, discourse is often perpetuated through dissimulation or the distortion of reality to maintain power relations. In these instances, Duncan and Perry's discourses served to maintain the racial status quo under the guise of morality and civil rights.

The conflicting discourses also create a level of incoherence that may complicate the efficacy of the educational policies that aim to advance civil rights for marginalized racial groups. Market-oriented leaders like Perry and Duncan may indeed believe that their policies further civil rights. They may also strategically utilize civil rights rhetoric to garner support for their efforts or employ this language to infuse their approaches with a sense of meaning and purpose. Despite these intentions and motivations, their discursive patterns suggest that they simultaneously articulate negative perceptions of racial groups. This incompatibility begets questions of authenticity of civil rights claims. One could suggest that the rhetoric serves primarily as a legitimization tactic in promoting school choice reforms that disproportionately affect communities of color. Given that the focal cases hold leadership positions within the market-oriented educational reform movement, this possibility is critical to explore. Furthermore, the competing discourses generate questions regarding the degree to which racial equity can be achieved. The leaders' discursive patterns suggest that underlying negative perceptions of racial groups are still maintained or that a particular 'type' of person of color, who exhibits specific characteristics and

behaviors, are the ones who are deserving of policy support. This language suggests that there are boundaries or parameters around which racial equity can be advanced. From these leaders' discourse, we can derive that the policies they advance come with stipulations as to what manner and what degree racial equity can be actualized.

## Conclusions and Implications

While analyzing Perry and Duncan's racial constructions amidst civil rights rhetoric is limited in showcasing how individuals working within the market-oriented education sector use these two discourses, this study provides insight into how colorblindness and negative racial construction can aggravate well-intended efforts to continue the legacy of the civil rights movement through education reform. The findings in this study suggest that espousing civil rights rhetoric alone may not be enough to further the cause of attenuating racial inequity. The use of colorblind discourse can undermine efforts to address racial disparities. Educational policymakers and leaders should consider the ways they discursively address race and the often subtle manner in which they may derogate racial groups to truly advance civil rights for people of color in policy efforts. While negative racial constructions may be consciously or unconsciously espoused, these leaders nonetheless inhabit a precarious position as they claim to stand in solidarity with people of color as they circulate negative depictions of them. This incompatibility may serve to alienate communities of color, delegitimize one's claims to furthering civil rights, and fundamentally undermine their claims to advancing racial equity.

In examining educational leaders' racial constructions amidst their civil rights invocations, this study contributes to educational research on the intersection of race, market reform, and civil rights. In employing CDA, I complement a robust body of literature that has elucidated how market reforms affect communities of color with an investigation of the manner in which leaders within this sector discuss and ultimately envision educational solutions to redress racial inequity. This microlevel unit of analyses also exposes the incompatibility of competing discourses, supplementing a discourse-focused body of research that investigates how racial representation and conceptualizations of civil rights can undermine the advancement of racial equity. The dynamics exposed through this microlevel discursive investigation reveal the manner in which this methodological approach can enhance policy scholarship. Through the use of CDA, policy researchers can interrogate subtle, contradictory messages conveyed in policy rhetoric, suggest how policy implementation may be complicated by the espousal of negative perceptions of marginalized racial groups, and consider how these incompatibilities may undermine claims to redress broader social justice.

While this study does contribute to the research base, future research should more expansively examine how racial constructions and civil rights rhetoric coexist across the landscape. Researchers should systematically examine this racialization process among a variety of market-oriented advocates and organizations so as to assess the degree to which colorblind discourse and deficit-laden narratives characterize the sector. In addition, future research could more extensively examine the juxtaposition of these discourses among a variety of leaders at the federal, state, and municipal levels and examine its articulation among other educational actors including principals and school leaders as means of exploring how the discourse of civil rights and race vary at different institutional levels. A more comprehensive exploration of this phenomenon will enable educational policy scholars to better understand how claims of civil rights advancement are complicated by the racial realities and discourses that characterize their context.

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## Appendix

### I. Transcription Conventions

Table A1

*Transcription Convention Key*

Symbol	Meaning
.	final falling intonation (as in end of declarative sentence)
?	end of interrogative question; end of sentence that ends in rising intonation
!	animated tone
,	(comma) indicates clause-final intonation (more to come) OR short pause in speaking; break in speech
..	brief pause without falling intonation (under 1/2 second, but more than one a comma)
...	clear pause without falling intonation (over .5 second)
- (hyphen)	self-interruption (usually mid-word)
:	extension of syllable/sound
::	more prolonged syllable/sound
=	latching (signaling no stop/pause between speaker's utterances OR no pause/stop between utterances in a conversation)
/	rising intonation (placed immediately before the rise)
\	falling intonation (placed immediately before the fall)
CAPS	emphasis on word/sound
((description))	sounds or actions captured (i.e., laughing, coughing, sneezing, clearing throat, interruption)
(t- )	inaudible

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# **SPECIAL ISSUE**

## **Critical Discourse Analysis and Education Policy**

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